

THE HUMAN PROVINCE

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FOR VEZA CANETTI

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Preface

This volume contains my jottings from 1942 to 1972. Thirty years of a conscious life are a long time. My aim was to make my own choice and presentation of this entire period. Whatever these years may have been like (and I have never concealed their terror, which I perceived as my own), I have to be grateful for experiencing them with an *alert* mind. If such a summing-up appears rather erratic, it is close to each moment in every sentence and it does contain the truth of *one* man.

I would like to describe the background of these jottings with the same words that prefaced one of my earlier volumes. Since their contents, from the years 1942 to 1960, have largely been included here, I may be permitted a briefer repetition of these words.

I realized that *Crowds and Power* might absorb me for several more decades. And the concentration on a single work, as well as a sort of prohibition that I placed on any other and especially a purely literary work, exerted a pressure that eventually took on dangerous dimensions. A safety valve was indispensable, and I found it, at the start of 1942, in my jottings. Their freedom and spontaneity, the conviction that they existed only for their own sake and served no purpose, my irresponsibility in never reading them again or changing them in any way, saved me from a fatal paralysis.

Gradually, they became an indispensable daily exercise. I felt that a special part of my life went into them. They ultimately grew into many volumes, and this presentation is merely a meager selection.

In late 1948, after lengthy preliminary work, I began to write *Crowds and Power*. This stretched over many years. There were qualms and doubts, and when the delays became perilous, I permitted myself, very rarely, to do some literary writing. It was only in 1959 that I could get myself to finish the manuscript that I regarded as my life's work. It is not surprising that a great deal of that opus flowed into the jottings that I regularly committed to paper during those years.

The reader should not be denied the adventure of encountering a few

little known but enormously consequential source works. In such cases it would be wrong to think of "reading" in the normal sense of the word. Such vehement excitement, keeping a man in suspense for weeks and months and not releasing him afterwards, has an effect like that of explorations among unknown tribes. The power is sometimes that of, I cannot put it any more tamely or calmly, Revelations. Likewise, a few examples of encounters with "enemies," namely thinkers whom one respects even though they offer a topsy-turvy picture of the world, strike me as sufficiently noteworthy to figure here. I have always particularly sought those who kept my sense of protest on the alert.

In one issue, which is the most important to me—the question of death—I have found only adversaries among all thinkers. That may explain why my own opinion appears here with the strength of a faith, never being declared without zeal and vehemence. Not even the jottings of 1961–1972, of which a selection is presented here for the first time, could remain free of that.

However, they had long since lost their safety valve character. They no longer emerged under the pressure of a task that had weighed heavily upon me. Whereas in the past, I had often felt that I would have to suffocate without the jottings, they now had their own inviolable right. The idea that I might publish some of them later on did not interfere with their freedom, for the selection was uncertain and could include only a very tiny portion.

Many men have tried to grasp their lives in the full spiritual and intellectual context, and those who have succeeded will never grow old. I wish that some men would also record the leaps in their lives. It seems that the leaps belong to *all* people; anyone can easily take whatever pertains to oneself. The loss of a superficial unity, inevitable in such an enterprise, cannot be regretted, for the true unity of a life is secret, and it is most effective when it unintentionally conceals itself.

1942

As of a certain age it would be nice to grow smaller again from year to year and go backwards over the same steps that we once so proudly climbed. The ranks and honors of old age would still have to be the same as today; so that very small people, the size of six- or eight-year-old boys, would be considered the wisest and most experienced. The oldest kings would be the shortest; there would only be very tiny popes; the bishops would look down on cardinals, the cardinals on the pope. No child could wish to become something great. History, because of its age, would lose significance; we would feel as if the events of three hundred years ago had taken place among insect-like creatures, and the past would have the good fortune to be overlooked.

The word *freedom* serves to express an important, perhaps *the* most important tension. People always want to get *away*, and if the place they want to get to has no name, if it is uncertain and they can't see any borders in it, they call it freedom.

The spatial expression of this tension is the vehement wish to cross a frontier as if it didn't exist. Freedom in flying—for the old, the mythical feeling, reaches as high as the sun. Freedom in time is the triumph over death, and people are quite content just to shove it further and further away. Freedom among *objects* is the liquidation of prices; and the ideal spendthrift, a very free man, desires nothing so much as an incessant changing of prices, undetermined by any rules, an aimless up and down, as though caused by the weather, beyond influence and not even really predictable. There is no freedom "to something," its blessing and its fortune are the tension of the man who wants to disregard barriers, and he always seeks the worst barriers to fulfill this wish. The man who wants to kill has to deal with the dreadful threats accompanying the shalt-not of killing, and if these threats hadn't so deeply tormented him, he would have certainly charged himself with happier tensions. The origin of freedom, however, lies in

breathing. Anyone can draw breath from any air, and the freedom to breathe is the only one that has not really been destroyed to this day.

Only an image can please you *totally*, but never a human being. The origin of angels.

How quickly flying, that ancient, precious dream, has lost all charm, all sense, its soul. Dreams come true, one after another, fulfilling themselves to death. Can you have a *new* dream?

How inconceivably modest are human beings who bind themselves to only one religion! I have very many religions, and the one overriding them is only forming throughout my life.

One sees thoughts stretching their hands out of the water, one believes they are calling for help. A mistake: They live below, intimate and very familiar with one another, just try and pull a single one out alone!

The balance between knowledge and ignorance determines how wise we get. Ignorance must not be impoverished by knowledge. Every answer must make a question (remote and seemingly unconnected) spring forth from its crouching slumber. The man with many answers has to have even more questions. The wise man remains a child all his life, and answers alone make his soil and his breath arid. Knowledge is a weapon only for the powerful, the wise man despises nothing so much as weapons. He is not ashamed of his wish to love more people than he knows; and he will never arrogantly isolate himself from all those he knows nothing about.

In the best times of my life I always think I am making room, even more room in me. Here I shovel away snow, there I raise aloft a piece of fallen sky; there are superfluous lakes, I let them run out (I save the fish), overgrown forests, I drive crowds of apes into them, everything is astir, but there's never enough room, I never ask why, I never feel why, I just have to keep making room, on and on, and as long as I can do so, I merit my life.

To think that this face has managed to bring on this war, and we didn't wipe it out! And we are millions strong, and the earth teems

with weapons, there is enough ammunition for three thousand years, and this face is still here, stretching wide above us, the gargoyle of the Gorgon, and we have all turned to stone in murdering.

More than anything we resemble bowling pins. They set us up in families, approximately nine. Squat and wooden, we stand there, not knowing what to do with our fellow pins. The way has long been paved for the stroke that is to bring us down; foolishly we wait; in falling we take along as many fellow pins as we can, it is the stroke that we pass on to them, the only contact we grant them in a hasty existence. Supposedly, we are set up again. But if that is so, then we are exactly the same in a new life, only we have changed places among the nine, in the family, and not even always; and wooden and foolish we wait again for the old stroke.

My greatest wish is to see a mouse devour a cat alive. But first she has to play with it long enough.

The days are distinct, but the night has only one name.

He has the heartless eyes of a man loved more than anything else in the world.

On Praying. Praying is the most effective and most dangerous form of repetition. The only protection against it is that it becomes mechanical, as in priests and prayer-mills. I fail to understand how people can undertake to work up the necessary fervor in each of their countless prayers. The total energy of all mankind would not be great enough for the praying babble of a single man who has fallen prey to this vice.

The infantilism of praying: people pray for what they get anyway instead of for the unattainable.

If we couldn't get along without prayers, we would be better off addressing many and very different gods. We would benefit from practicing transformations, which would be indispensable for praying.

The man who meant it earnestly would have to spend weeks and weeks screwing up his courage for a single prayer.

They can take their God into their mouths like bread. They can name him, call him, explain him as often as they like. They chew up his name, they swallow his body. Then they say there's nothing higher

for them than God. I suspect that many praying people contrive to get hold of all sorts of things from God, things they wouldn't give to anyone else and which they swipe before anyone else can get at them. The funny thing is that they all want the same thing, to wit, the most common necessities of life, and that they do pray together after all. They are like a gang of beggars who, an impudent, bothersome swarm, pounce together on a lone stranger.

Even if I could believe, I couldn't possibly pray. Praying has always struck me as the most insolent pestering of God, as the really most disgusting sin, and I would insert a long period of repentance for every prayer.

Sometimes I think the sentences I hear were negotiated by other people three thousand years before my lifetime. If I listen closely, they get older and older.

The inklings of poets are the forgotten adventures of God.

You lofty words, you gazes to the sun, you kisses from star to stars, you vain storms, you swaggering, hopping lightning—birds will sing tenderly when people have completely wiped one another out. And the birds will yearn for us, and the mocking birds among them will preserve our conversations for a long time.

We would have to have a yearly festival for training people to endure being robbed. There could not be anything that the mystes of this festival could not put their hands upon, no valuable, no object of the most sacred memory. Nothing could ever be given back. Protective measures before the outbreak of the festival would have to be strictly forbidden. Nor would it be permitted to track down the further destinies and uses of the missing objects. Only human beings, the oldest and the youngest, would be exempt from the fate of being stolen. Perhaps they would thereby regain some of the value that things have taken from them. One can imagine the woe of some unfortunates after these saturnalia; but it could almost be made up for if they themselves made thorough use of the time of the festival. Property would lose much that was divine and eternal about it. During the remaining, honest time of the year, a man would have to put up with stolen goods in his house along with things that are bought or given; and only those

stolen goods would be sacrosanct, that is, safe against further robbery at the next festival.

Man has all the wisdom of his forebears put together, and just look at what a lunkhead he is!

Proof is the hereditary misfortune of thinking.

Knowledge has a tendency to show itself. If kept secret, it has to wreak vengeance.

It is not in God's power to save *even one single* person from death. That is what makes God one and only.

The outer bearing of people is so ambiguous that you only have to present yourself as you are to live fully unrecognized and concealed.

A war always proceeds as if humanity had never hit upon the notion of justice.

History preserves something different from any earlier forms of transmitting the past. It is hard to determine what. More than anything, history strikes one as a fixated vendetta of the masses, of *all* masses, and that is exactly what condemns history. It provides for the perpetuation of all religions, nations, classes. For even the most peaceful among them have at some point drawn blood from someone, and history faithfully screams it to high heaven. Much has been attempted against it, but we never escape. History is the giant serpent that imprisons the world. An age-old vampire, it sucks blood from the brain of every young person. It is not to be borne the way it commands exactly the same thing in many different languages. The most disgraceful forms of belief, which everyone ought to be ashamed of, are kept alive by history as it proves their age. No one has ever felt obligated to it except for a few thin priests, and they would have had an easier time without history. One can object that history has brought the earth very close to unification, but at what price, and *is* the world already at one with itself? It seems to me as if history used to be better or at least more innocuous in the days when it got lost from time to time. Today it is shackled to itself with the chains of writing. It offers to the future

centuries the falsest, basest, and most untruthful documents. No one can sign a contract today without people knowing it a thousand years hence. No one can come into the world unnoticed; he is at least included in some statistic. No one can think, no one can breathe, history corrupts his pure breath and twists the words around in his brain. How powerful the Heracles who could strangle it! Even death will be overcome more easily than history, and the first and only exploiter of a triumph over death will once again be history.

Humanity as a whole will never again be able to *resign* itself.

It takes years to destroy a person's love; but no life is long enough to lament this murder, nothing is more of a murder.

The law of correspondences in psychological life: we cannot do anything to another person, no matter how secretly, without something corresponding happening to us. It may be possible that retribution is already contained in the form of our actions.

The thought of a future religion, of which we as yet know nothing, has something unspeakably agonizing about it.

People are downright innocent in the use of their pet words and sayings. They fail to sense what they betray when prattling innocuously. They believe they are concealing a secret by talking about other things, but lo and behold, their most frequent expressions suddenly make their secret loom out, threatening and somber.

The lowest man: he whose wishes have all come true.

God himself loosed the serpent on Adam and Eve, and everything depended on its not betraying Him. This venomous creature has stayed loyal to God even to this day.

Molière's death: He cannot give up acting, the great parts he performs and the applause they evoke from the crowd mean too much to him. His friends keep asking him to leave off acting, but he rejects their well-meaning advice. On the very day of his death he explains he cannot deprive the actors of their earnings. In reality, however, he only

cares for the applause of the crowd, it seems as if he can't live without it. How strange then that on the day of his funeral a hostile crowd gathers before his home, the negative to that crowd in the theater. The hostile crowd consists of church-followers; but, as though realizing it has a mysterious connection to that clapping crowd, the new crowd disperses when money is thrown to it: it is the admission price refunded.

The various languages you ought to have: one for your mother, which you will subsequently never speak again; one which you only read but never dare to write; one in which you pray but without understanding a single word; one in which you do arithmetic and to which all money matters belong; one in which you write (but no letters); one in which you travel, and in this one you can also write your letters.

The fact that there are *different* languages is the most sinister fact in the world. It means that there are different names for the same things; and one would have to doubt that they are the same things. All linguistics hides the striving to reduce all languages back to *one*. The tale of the Tower of Babel is the tale of the second Fall of Man. After losing their innocence and eternal life, human beings wanted to grow artificially to the heavens. First they had tasted of the wrong tree, not they mastered its ways and grew straight up. In return, they lost what they had managed to retain after the first Fall: the unity of names. God's deed was the most diabolical ever committed. The confusion of names was the confusion of his own Creation, and it is impossible to tell why he bothered to save anything from the Flood.

If people had even the faintest and most non-committal idea of the life and living that go on in them, they would shrink back from many words and phrases as from poison.

Whenever you observe an animal closely, you feel as if a human being sitting inside were making fun of you.

On drama. It is gradually becoming clear to me that in drama I was trying to realize something derived from music. I treated constellations of figures like themes. My chief resistance against the "development" of characters (as though they were real live people) recalls the fact that in

music the instruments are givens. As soon as you have opted for a certain instrument, you hold fast to it, you cannot rebuild it into another instrument as the work progresses. Something of the beautiful severity of music is based on this specificity of the instruments.

Reducing a dramatic figure to an animal is quite compatible with this notion. Every instrument is a specific animal or at least a particular and delimited creature that can only be played with on its own terms. Drama has the divine possibility, beyond all other arts, of inventing new animals, that is to say, new instruments, and always a different form according to the thematic structure. Thus there exists an inexhaustible variety of dramas as long as there are new "animals." Creation, whether exhausted or else outstripped by rapid Man, is thus literally shifted into drama.

It remains to be proven how greatly opera has confused drama. Musical drama is the untidiest and most nonsensical kitsch that was ever devised. Drama is a very specific kind of music and endures the addition of music only seldom and sparingly. In no event are instruments to be attuned to dramatic figures, otherwise the figures turn allegorical and dramatically quite insignificant; these are merely fable animals acting here; with the music becoming everything, drama becomes nothing.

It's no use, you can sing choruses, goggle at cannibals, climb two hundred years back up the tree trunk, you can lock up the month for lunacy, go on a pilgrimage to Palestine in harmless hosts of crusaders, with a whole hardware store on your body, listen to Buddha, propitiate Mohammed, believe Christ, keep watch over a bud, paint a blossom, prevent a fruit; and you can follow the sun as soon as it doubles, train dogs to meow, cats to bark, give a hundred-year-old man all his teeth back, pick forests, water bald pates, castrate cows, milk bulls; you can, if everything is too easy (we deal with everything so quickly) master the language of the Neanderthals, clip Shiva's arms, empty Brahma's heads of the antiquated Vedas, dress the naked Veddahs, hinder the chanting of the angelic choruses in God's heavens, spur on Lao-tse, incite Confucius to patricide, knock the cup of hemlock from Socrates' hand and immortality from his lips—but it's no use, it's no use, there is no deed, there is no thought but one: *When will the murdering stop?*

Oh, for a stethoscope, a fine stethoscope to identify the generals in their wombs!

Never have people known less about themselves than in this "Age of Psychology." They are not able to stand still. They rush away from their own metamorphoses. They don't wait for them, they forestall them, they would rather be anything but what they could be. They drive cars through the landscapes of their own psyches, and since they only halt at gas stations, they think they're made of gasoline. Their engineers build nothing else: whatever they eat smells of gasoline. They dream in black pools.

There is no uncannier notion than that of the abandoned earth, abandoned by human beings. People tend to think that they emigrate, if for no other reason than to take along their memory of the earth. They could never be as well-off as here. Far-reaching instruments would have to enable them to observe the world but without recognizing what is really happening on it. They would understand what they have lost, an inexhaustible homeland, and the false religion to which they have to ascribe this loss would already have been traded in, far too late, for another. One can assume that this new religion would be the right one; had it come in time, it would have saved the earth for mankind.

It is advisable to tempt the gods, the more often, the better; and do not give them a moment's peace. They sleep too much and leave man alone on the raft of his dying brothers.

The dead are nourished by judgments, the living by love.

No fool and no fanatic will ever take from me the love for all those whose dreams were overshadowed and curtailed. Man will still become all and whole. The slaves will redeem the masters.

The "slain"—how grand that sounded, how open, how broad and courageous: the "choked," the "crushed," the "charred," the "burst," how penny-pinching that sounds, as though it had cost nothing!

We have no standard any more for anything, ever since human life is no longer the standard.

A man undertakes to count all the *leaves* in the world. The essence of statistics.

He stole my left ear. I took his right eye. He concealed fourteen of my teeth. I sewed up his lips. He stewed my behind. I turned his heart inside-out. He ate my liver. I drank his blood. *War*.

A fight that is not fought with intellectual weapons alone disgusts me. The dead opponent attests only to his own death.

I do not want to inspire fear, there is nothing in the world I am so ashamed of. Better to be despised than feared.

He joins the army: he no longer wants to know what happens; he no longer wants to know what he does.

The Peace Conference resolved to give Europe the fair shake it had earned in a long and hard war. Everything is to start on the same level. To make this possible, an interterritorial fleet of bombers is formed for destroying any cities that still happen to be standing.

God is the greatest arrogance of mankind; and when they have atoned him, they will never find a greater arrogance.

Honorary posts are for the feeble-minded; it is better to live in disgrace than in honor: anything but honors; freedom at any price, to *think*. Honors are hung around your eyes and ears like tapestries; who can still see; who can still hear; dreams choke to death in honors, and the good years wither.

He keeps his money in his heart, the beats count it.

He will return to the full and wonderful world if no one dies anymore and people carry out their wars by means of ants, who are very human.

The poet is probably the man who senses what has been in order to predict what will be. Thus he doesn't really suffer, he merely remembers; and he doesn't *do* anything because he first has to predict it.

There is always something shady about subscribing to a faith that very many people have shared beforehand. There is more resignation in that act than could be framed in human words. Faith is a human faculty

that can be *expanded*, and anyone who can do so ought to contribute to this expansion.

Men's voices are God's bread.

It is strange to see an Oriental come to the fore in an Englishman. Recently, upon encountering such an astonishing Englishman, I thought it must be a mistake, the Oriental would vanish again. But then I saw him increasing, and he became very weighty, almost a Buddha. For such a man there is nothing left to do but believe in reincarnation; how else could he get his bearings in his English situation.

He shows himself to be an Oriental as follows: He likes to sit calmly in his spot, and he will not permit this calm to be railed against as laziness; for through it one can attain great wisdom. He likes to be worshipped by women; he is impressed with a new woman he meets even though he knows many others; one doesn't exclude the other; and he doesn't hesitate to show he likes her. As soon as he senses that he is not hurting any feelings, he utters peculiar and destructive thoughts about God, products of his sitting which strike him as original even though he heard them in India; for England they are still original.

He is imprecise; he easily confuses names, dates, and places. He knows it and he doesn't care. Relationships are empty and meaningless; all he cares about is the deeper meaning of his sentence. Now the English are ill with precision; unpunctuality is the second greatest sin, ranking just below murder; in shaving, no hair must be overlooked; the minutes of a visit are counted before it begins; the fence around a property is sacred; a book consists of a number of letters; no one lies. It is easy to imagine how this Oriental in his emphatic phlegmatism towards all precision stands out from his fellow Englishmen.

Even his friendliness has a different tinge. He praises every single person in question, not as loudly, to be sure, but certainly as extravagantly as a Southerner. The most ludicrous person is marvelous, exemplary, and sublime. He addresses people with titles that they might wish for. But with no real irony (he lacks all sharpness), he hints at how unimportant titles are. His yearning for everlasting peace is full of regret that he will soon no longer be here, he has a weak heart; and he is not ashamed of speaking about his illness; his thorough way of doing it particularly reveals that regret. He would like people to admire his ill heart, and they ought to be amazed that he still works "creatively,"

he writes. Of all human activities, writing is certainly the calmest, hence proper for the Oriental, who with his legs crossed, his bearing dignified, can let it proceed on a small table, with small round motions. If he were really still an Englishman, he would take care not to mention that he possesses a heart, let alone a sick one, and as for his writing, he would have demurely locked it away.

If you have seen a person sleeping, you can never hate him again.

Man is in love with his weapons. What can we do against that? Weapons should be constructed in such a way that they frequently and unexpectedly turn against the man using them. Their terror is too one-sided. It is not enough that the enemy operate with the same means. The weapon itself ought to have a capricious and unpredictable life, and people ought to be more afraid of the dangerous thing in their hands than of the enemy.

Of all human religions, war is the most tenacious; but it too can be disbanded.

If you all had to face one another naked, you would have a hard time slaughtering. The murderous uniforms.

Belief in God has something crucial in its favor: People believe in the existence of a being that cannot be killed, not even with the worst efforts.

In the dark, words weigh double.

Today it is no longer true that apes are closer to man than other animals. For a long time we may not have been very different from them; back then, we were closely related; today, countless changes have brought us so far away from them that we have no less of the birds in us than of the apes.

To understand how we have become human beings, the most important thing would surely be to examine the imitative faculties of apes. Such experiments would have a very specific meaning of their own. We would have to keep the apes for a long time with animals previously unknown to them and carefully register the extent to which their be-

havior is influenced by these animals. We would have to change the animals of their environment in a changing succession. Sometimes, after such powerful impressions, we would have to leave them to their own devices. With many experiments of this kind, the empty concept of imitation could fill up somewhat, and we might realize that it always involved a change, not merely for the sake of "adjustment," and that adjustment is merely the result of semi-successful awkward changes.

In regard to human beings, these processes can best be studied in myth and drama. Dreams, in which they were always present, offer much less precision and allow arbitrary interpretations. Myth is not only more beautiful, it is also more useful for the purposes of such an investigation, for it remains constant. Its fluidity is internal, it does not dwindle away before your very eyes. Wherever it is played, it always returns in the same way. It is the most constant thing that people are capable of bringing forth; no instrument has been as consistent through the millennia as some myths. Their holiness protects them, their depiction eternalizes them, and whoever can imbue mankind with a myth has accomplished more than the most daring inventor.

Drama is, of all human possibilities of summing-up, the least untruthful.

Whenever the English go through bad times, I am wonder-struck by their Parliament. It is like a soul that has been made radiant and sonorous, a representative model offering to all eyes something that would otherwise remain secret. In addition to the freedom they are always talking about, the people here have acquired an unknown freedom: the freedom of openly confessing political misdeeds and receiving an absolution that depends on an earthly body. There is a possibility here of attacking the rulers, a possibility that has no equal anywhere in the world. And they are no less rulers for it; everything truly depends on their decisions; they probably have the strong consciousness necessary for that, but not the bumptiousness, for the latter is thoroughly marred for them by Parliament. Six hundred ambitious men watch one another with hawks' eyes; weaknesses cannot remain concealed; strengths make a difference as long as they are strengths. Everything takes place out in the open; they are incessantly quoted. But one can also stand aloof and warn, in the middle of the daily hustle and bustle.

The prophet, if only he has enough patience, can wait here. He learns to express himself in such a way that the world understands him. In general, the clarity of all utterances brought forth here is the primary condition for effectiveness. As complicated as the real play for power may be—on the outside, it proceeds along carefully established demands and stakes.

There is nothing more remarkable than this nation doing its most important business in a ritual, sporting way, and not deviating even when the water is up to its neck.

The novel should not be in any hurry. Once, hurry belonged to its sphere, now the film has taken that over; measured by the film, the hasty novel must always remain inadequate. The novel, as a creature of calmer times, may carry something of that old calm into our new hastiness. It could serve many people as a slow-motion; it could induce them to tarry; it could replace the empty meditations of their cults.

He has the wit of his wickedness, the forgetfulness of his age, the narrow-mindedness of his ancestry, and the brutality of his profession: a great general.

I hate the eternal willingness for truth, truth out of habit, truth out of duty. Truth is supposedly a storm, and when it has cleared the air, it passes on. Truth should strike like lightning, otherwise it will have no effect. Whoever knows truth should be afraid of it. Truth should never become the dog of mankind; woe to him who whistles for it. We should not take it on a leach, we should not take it in our mouths. We should not feed it, not measure it; one should let it grow in its dreadful peace. Even God got too familiar with truth, and *that's* what he choked on.

Man is as eternal as he cares about the eternal—so long as he doesn't drown in it.

Animals do not realize that we name them. Or else they do realize it, and that may be why they fear us.

Dying is too easy. It ought to be much harder to die.

A land of unlimited eternity: You have to walk for days before bumping into anyone who lifts his little finger slightly; all the others sit around, mute and Egyptian.

The English never wrote down their laws, they carry them about with them on their person.

In England, words waste away.

Jews will still have to exist even when the last Jew is wiped out.

The greatest danger a man with increasing consciousness has to watch out for is the quick change of the light in which things and convictions appear to him more and more. Everything fluctuates; the most fluid things become visible; one cannot get to the end of anything; every wall has its gate, there is always something else behind it; the same flowers present themselves in new colors; the granite-hard street softens into clay. One may have wanted something very definite for twenty years, and then, in a greater consciousness, one no longer wants it. What one regarded as ugly turns into manifold beautiful forms: they dwindle after an airy and shimmering dance. Everything becomes possible, disapproval weak, judgment bends like a blade of grass in the wind; the bones expand to any length, a thought has as much blood as one likes; and man, who has become everything, is capable of anything.

How many objects did mankind have to produce to bring about a philosophy of materialism.

Swift's central experience is power. He is a frustrated ruler. His satirical assaults stand for death verdicts. They were denied him in his life, they slipped into his satire. So the latter is, in the truest sense of the word, the most dreadful thing a writer ever had at his disposal.

He imitates kingdoms, he refashions them, the courts won't leave his mind. He always scornfully depicts the way courts regulate their realms; and he always lets us feel (it is the only thing he lets us feel) how much better he could regulate them.

Journal to Stella is unique because it shows, naked and unvarnished,

and with very few false pretensions, the intellectual who, amid the ruthless two-party system of his time, is after power but cannot have it because he has seen through this system all too accurately.

These worm-souls, how are they to understand that one has to despise money even while needing it.

People are delighted over wishes that come true for others, especially if they haven't had anything to do with it: as if there were, invisibly, such things as well-wishing and heeding, who knows where.

Act as you could never act again.

The successful man hears only clapping hands. Otherwise he is deaf.

All the past dominion of the world, all scorn, oppression, subjugation, has concentrated in the sick heart of a single man; the earth has fallen to him, the reverse scapegoat, and he is punishing it for *its entire history*.

I have never heard of a person attacking power without wanting it, and the religious moralists are the worst in this respect.

The monstrous life of dogs with each other: the smallest can get to the biggest, and on occasion the result is puppies. Much more so than we, dogs live among giants and dwarves, who, however, are their equals and speak the same language. The things that can happen to them! What grotesque antipodes try to mate! How afraid they can be, how greatly they feel drawn to the wickedest things! And always their gods at hand, always a whistle and a retreat into the more rigorous world of symbolic burdens. If often seems as though the entire religious existence that we have pictured for ourselves, with devils, dwarves, spirits, angels, and gods, is taken from the real existence of dogs. Whether we have represented our manifold beliefs in them, whether we have become human beings only by keeping dogs—in any event we can tell from them what we ourselves are doing, and presumably most masters are more thankful for this semi-conscious knowledge than for the gods whose names are on their lips.

Music is the best solace if for no other reason than because it doesn't make new words. Even when it is set to words, its own magic prevails and snuffs out the danger of the words. It is purest, however, when playing for itself. One believes it absolutely, for its assurance is one of the feelings. Its course is freer than anything else that seems humanly possible, and this freedom contains its redemption. The more densely populated the world and the more machine-like the formation of life, the more indispensable music has to become. There will come a time when music alone will provide a way of slipping through the tight meshes of functions; leaving music as a powerful and uninfluenced reservoir of freedom must be accounted the most important task of intellectual life in the future. Music is the truly living history of humanity, of which otherwise we only have dead parts. One does not need to draw from music for it is always within us; all we have to do is listen simply, otherwise we would learn in vain.

I really know what a tiger is only since Blake's poem.

Miracles as wretched vestiges of the ancient, vigor-filled metamorphoses.

Any idiot can befuddle the most complicated mind whenever he feels like it.

The promise of immortality is enough to put a religion on its feet. The mere command to kill is enough to wipe out three quarters of humanity. What do people want? Life or death? They want to live and kill, and as long as they want that, they will have to make do with the various promises of immortality.

Some sentences release their poison only after years.

What hope is for the poor man, an heir is for the rich man.

Believe no one who always speaks the truth.

Success, the rat poison of mankind; very few people escape.

Doubt deludes itself more than faith.

Every language has its own silence.

In all events, those men have triumphed who forced the world back into the psychological structure of war. They can all perish to the very last man: they leave behind the war and the following wars.

The Jews are in Egypt again, but they have been divided into three groups: some have been allowed to leave; the others have been forced to do hard labor; the rest are being killed. Thus all their old destinies are to be repeated at once.

One can't do a thing. One can lament. One can become better.

Cursed be revenge, and if they murder my most beloved brother, I want no revenge, I want other people.

Wars are fought for their own sake. As long as people refuse to admit this, they cannot really fight against war.

1943

Since the war began, thoughts and sentences have gotten terse, conforming to the tone of commands. People want anything, except prolonging and continuing what has come about in this time. They would like to leave it all behind like machine-gun fire. No one knows who is coming home, and no one knows where he will be at home. So no one settles too broadly in any sentence, and we brush many sentences away like leaves on a road. The newspapers, "running something different every day," and radio reports are the apes of the moment; by the time you notice them on one tree, they have already leapt to the next. The Methuselah of war is one day old, normal existences count by hours. Supposedly, some people don't even know what they were fighting for an instant earlier; and some say that hundreds of thousands of corpses are obstructing the clearest goal. The corpses are not floating off on willing rivers everywhere; the traveling cremation kitchens are often late. The well-cemented skull towers of the Tartars were more advisable; they offered a rich view. However, the experiments on utilizing dead hearts and bowels have made progress; it is not out of the question that each side will resurrect its own corpses with those of the enemy, and then wars would have a deeper meaning, of which only its prophets have had any foreboding until now. The interpretations of such colossal processes have not gone very far; but the figures are already stating that these must be eminently vital processes, for would millions of people be dying for nothing? And going to a willing death and feeling pride and fighting to be first? It is always figures that shame the skeptic. People do not *like* to die. In war, millions of them do die. So wars must have some special meaning, and perhaps no one knew how to exploit the enemy corpses properly. Head-hunting was ridiculed, and the cannibals were made fun of. But there's a healthy core in these children of nature, and just as they know about healing herbs and venoms, they must certainly know, and in any case better than we, why they have to eat their enemies of all people. One thing

You cannot put up with anything more unless you force yourself to articulate it right away; there is too much here, and you are now in the river. You will never escape from this river until you reach the estuary. It is better to swim along voluntarily instead of constantly struggling against the current.

A man spoke to his wife: "It's raining, I'm going to have pleasant dreams." The start of a tale from Surinam.

He went there, evening after evening. She received him amicably. He remained for hours. He left her lying in a desert of destroyed secrets and went away.

Getting lost in another person, who lives, exists, looks at you, speaks to you; the search within him has something desperate about it: "Where is it?" you tell him, "are you hiding it? It still exists, doesn't it?" And so you investigate him and hunt through him in vain, and everything is sunken; but there is no sea far and wide in which he could have sunk it; and nothing else is important, only this search, it is the hunt for the nothingness you have become in the other.

The restorer. A cross between an actor and an archeologist. He has to play the role of the painter whose picture he is restoring. By lifting off layer after layer, cautiously and making sure that nothing is shifted, he eventually gets to the picture of the man he is playing. His awe is imbued with his expectation. But he is also active: much remains in his power. The more scarcely recognizable things he restores, the greater his success as an archeologist. This humble side of his nature can turn into its reverse if he gives free rein to his arbitrary side and presents things that cannot be completed anymore—presents them according to his speculations. He may ultimately think so highly of himself that he totally invents pictures, but he will always remain in an accepted role, like that great majority of actors who never write plays themselves.

The metamorphoses of the restorer are prescribed; art history contains the full list of his personae; he adds none himself. He likewise accepts their hierarchy; he reaps the most honor with the greatest names.

1950

I would give a great deal to get rid of my habit of seeing the world historically. How wretched is this division by years and its transfer to the life of animals and plants, when they were not yet burdened by us. The crown of human tyranny is the counting of years; the most oppressive of all legends is the story of the creation of the world for us.

Every year makes a man more impudent.

A country that hangs its scum out the windows as flags.

Human beings as ships and their disgusting freight.

The worst crowd one could think of is a crowd consisting solely of *acquaintances*.

The truly noble doctor, who invents a new disease for each of his patients.

The greediness in some disease names: meningitis.

Redeem psychiatry from itself: five hundred or a thousand precise accounts, and not a word of division or explanation!

He imagines how people would have stood their own against an evil god. They would have become good *against* him. They would never have expected anything of him or prayed for anything to him, they would always have fought against him. Some would have hidden from him—cave artists; others would have hunted him down—bold sportsmen.

Their faith that they could once succeed in improving God.

Perhaps every breath you take is someone else's last.

The city in which no one weeps. They built their cathedral around the millennial tear, as a relic.

Even in the best satirists, I am bothered by their reasonability, the shallow pond from which their enormous ideas emerge.

A philosopher getting through life without a single answer. But oh how he asks!

Women on stilts, throwing themselves from high up into the arms of the unsuspecting men they have chosen.

History portrays everything as if it could never have come otherwise. Yet it could have happened in a hundred different ways. History is on the side of what has happened, detaching it in a stronger context from what has not happened. Among all possibilities, it banks on the one, the surviving one. Thus history always seems as if it existed for the *stronger*, for what has actually happened; it could not have *not* happened, it *had* to happen.

Ranke recognizes power, and the fulfillment of power is history for him. Historians who do not worship power cannot write a coherent history of states. Rome sufficed for many of them long after it ceased existing. Of the four great periods in history, such as Voltaire saw it, Louis XIV's was the last: the adversary of a history of kings and battles was no less influenced by power than any normal chronicler of wars.

Ranke's peculiarity as a historian is his pluralism; he is a polytheist of power. Since, during the centuries before him, as in his own, there were a number of great powers, he has to announce them all. For those who were no longer great, Spain and Turkey, he seems to have felt something like embarrassment.

How much will men kill when they can revive everything?

He has so much money that the bombs eat out of his hand.

Now hanging has all the gentleness of fishing.

It turns out that there is no such thing as the atom. Yet the atomic bomb remains.

"How can one be just to someone with no notion of justice?"—"Does one thereby destroy justice? Is justice so sensitive?"

For everyone you love, you need someone to take your abuse; and in order to save on people, you would have to properly combine the couples of abusing and loving.

This urge of mine to know everything about all people, no matter when or where they lived, as though my salvation were contingent on each one, his peculiarity, uniqueness, the course of his life, and then what they should be together.

To become a town, a whole country, a continent, and not conquer anything.

A special lightning-bolt for misers, taking everything of theirs at once.

The best man would not be the one who needs the least, but the one who gives away the most through what he needs.

The notion that the earth is under observation is the best-deserved fiction it has ever gotten.

It well may be that we are being observed by several observers, and it may be that they are fighting over possessing the earth.

Overseers of an alien star for the earth, hearing us, but to whom we cannot possibly speak.

To think that the technological development of the earth could have drawn the attention of aliens to us; that they have regarded us as a real danger ever since the first atomic bomb went off; that they have since conferred about our destruction, which may be imminent very shortly.

A few remaining primitives will then be the only ones who do not distinguish between us and the aliens, who understand *nothing* of what has happened, the last ingenuous earth-dwellers, natives, lost and innocent at once.

Amazement and disgust when the discoverers open the first stinking human skin, performance of a feeding, illumination of a digesting.

Assume they had light units instead of persons, and all boundaries, even between people, disgusted them, light instead of fat.

And what if they had chosen the earth as *their* graveyard?

Everything about *The Numbered* is mysterious to me. I cannot calculate the effect of any scene on life. I fear *immediate* connections, as if I were in the middle of a network of rigorous shalt-nots, which I offend with every new scene. To make up for my sins, I would have to devise a new scene each time, balancing the earlier one, i.e., outweighing it. How can I tell if such balancing scenes will be successful?

Perhaps all thoughts until today have revolved around one that still waits to be thought. Perhaps everything depends on this thought's really being thought. Perhaps there is no certainty that it will be thought.

A man who can only stray his way home. Each time, he has to find a *different* route.

It is a dreadful peacefulness that comes over one when more and more people fall around one. One becomes quite passive, one does not hit back anymore, one becomes a pacifist in the war against death, and one turns the other cheek to death and one's neighbor too. Religions profit from this, this fatigue and feebleness.

A man becomes a mass murderer because a disease which felled the person he loved most became curable shortly after his death.

I cannot read about any primitive nation anymore. I myself am an entire primitive nation.

He reads in order to remain rational, intelligible to himself. Otherwise—what might have become of him by now! The books he holds, regards, opens, reads, are his leaden weights. He clutches them with the strength of an unfortunate about to be swept away by a tornado.

Without the books he would live more strongly, but where would he be? He wouldn't know his place, he wouldn't orient himself. Books are his compass, memory, calendar, geography.

God as a preparation for something more sinister that we do not yet know.

Passersby and "eternal" ones. I am haunted by the thought of a bizarre world in which the people *halt* at a very specific age, each at a different one. One man hurriedly becomes thirty, and stays there. Another hobbles along till seventy, and then remains seventy. Some run around as children of twelve, and never get any further. There are two classes of people, some are en route to their goals, the others have reached it. Some children may pass through their twelfth year, but there are others, *eternal* twelve-year-olds as it were.

These *eternals* come in all shapes and sizes, children, men, women, old people. They have a certain sense of superiority, nothing else can happen to them. They lose interest in their years; once they reach the second main period, they no longer calculate, they *remain* what they have become. They have the privileges of their permanence, they recognize one another and greet one another in a uniquely respectful way. Their actions are suitable to what one might call their basic age. They are models for the others, who are known as "passersby." Each of the passersby has an "eternal" as godfather, and *he* determines the passersby's goal.

Passersby and "eternals" all live together and are not separated. Intermarrying is not forbidden, but does involve difficulties. An "eternal" can fall in love with a passerby, his love for her is then exposed to all of *her* changes. She may have to pass through a number of years before reaching his class; from that moment on, she will no longer interest him. In contrast, a passerby may be seized with the ambition of loving only "eternals," and seducing one such woman after another, until he finally comes to rest himself as an "eternal." And only this world can offer the kind of happiness which we thoroughly ephemeral mortals sometimes long for: one "eternal" can find another "eternal," and they never change, together they can remain the same. They can exhaust their feeling for one another without the influence of time eroding it. They can find out whether they truly belong together; they, and only they, can test and prove their feelings.

Whoever regards love as important in this intensified way may find it and keep it. Whoever is excited by a change in the other, even though he has achieved constancy for his own nature, can, as an "eternal," court a passerby. Whoever wants to live in flux but has to worship what remains even and palpable, he, as a passerby, will look for an "eternal." Those, however, who, in their own changeability, can endure only changeable things, can be passersby sticking to other passersby.

In this world, everyone could find what he needs for his happiness.

A land in which the people weep when they eat.

The pious friend thinks that God lets a new human being be born for every good deed and someone die for every bad deed.

He believes that there are angels who stop up your ears at the right moment.

Assume that the promises are cut off for *everyone else* as for you, that no one senses anything further, that everything is over for everybody the moment he dies, that people have become thoroughly *secular*, here, everywhere, and for the future. What, exactly what, would then change in their life together? Would they be less enterprising or more? More cunning? More closed-off? Would it be enough for them to conceal their wickedness, till the very last moment, fully aware that they will then be rid of it at one swoop? Or would the memory they leave behind replace the afterlife fully?

I do not believe that this can be precisely decided, since remnants of faith in each person help to shape this opinion. But I could imagine that the desire to do good becomes a true passion in every faithless person, as though he himself stood for a wise supreme power and for everything one awaits from it.

Human. Will they never succeed in driving out the word for them? Is there such a thing as an unshakable human being?

Nothing is more boring than to be worshiped. How can God stand it?

What often bothers me about Montaigne is the fat on the quotations.

The mellow. A man who mellows other people's statements, wishes, and actions until he manages to create an environment in which nothing irritates him. His gestures, his caution, the calm he radiates. His fearless good-cheer, his freedom from curiosity. Even though he mellows everything, he *knows* about nothing, he goes about like a blind man. He senses only what can be enfeebled, and his measured activity focuses on that exclusively. He does not walk too fast or too slow; his words are like notes, each of his sentences a few measures of carefully selected music.

He is always able to make the individual aware of the universal: a man loves—as all men love; a man has died—like all men. The intellectual substance he operates with is very small; which also helps make him effective. He neither judges nor condemns, because it always affects the individual; he never accuses anyone, and he is never amazed.

Whatever happens, it has happened so often that there is nothing special about it. Powerful people no more exist for him than do poor people. He sees people as leaves, they are as similar to one another as leaves, transparently friendly, their lot is gentle. Their case is considered only something of the common run. Just what is the individual leaf that falls?

He never suffers hunger, he denies himself nothing, and if ever he wants anything too greatly, he imperceptibly veers away and forgets it. The mellow never has an accident. If he happens to witness one, he will not acknowledge it. If someone confronts him and forces him to take a stand on it, he proves, with a smile, that it was all for the best. Anyone who suffers poverty would have been destroyed by wealth. Anyone who dies has been spared a protracted suffering. Anyone who hates is ill. Anyone who loves too much is likewise ill. Any account of old terrors, nay, all human history is a fairy tale. For never could people have done what history says they did; people don't do it now either.

I know very well how the mellow acts, but I don't know what he looks like.

One should see "great" people harshly. One has to act towards them as they act themselves. They are "great" only when harsh. The mercy they do not know must not shine upon them, it puts them in a false light. Cruel the way they fight with one another, cruel the way they

tread down; that's how one should experience them, everything else is deception.

The first effect of adjusting to other people is that one becomes *boring*.

The unerring hallmark of a great book: one is ashamed, when reading it, of ever having written a line; yet afterwards, one must reluctantly write again, and in such a way as though one had never written a line.

The rocking of the writing, as though it had been written on water.

Could it be that her death has cured me of jealousy? I have become more tolerant towards the people I love. I watch over them less, I grant them their freedom. I tell myself: Do this, you people, do that, do whatever you enjoy, so long as you live, do anything possible against me, if you have to, hurt me, cheat me, push me aside, hate me—I expect nothing, I want nothing, only this: *that you live*.

He tore his heart to shreds. It was pure velvet.

The chief mourner, who has inherited a hundred friends. He is satisfied with that.

In order to tame wild beasts, he blows into their noses. When the tamer told me that, it reminded me of how mellow and addicted I became when someone blew into my *ears*.

Dangers of pride: One becomes so proud that one does not measure oneself with anybody anymore. One does not confide in anybody one fears. One confides only in people who admire one. One does less and less and finally one does nothing, in order not to endanger the attitude of pride.

How can relinquishing the dominated be learned? How can one open one's hand without shrinking in one's emotions? How can one yearn for the familiar without inducing its approach? How can one forgo one's property without destroying it?

A world in which no person *recognizes* anyone else. The main activity of these people would be to convince each other *that they are who they are*.

Only the non-believer has a right to miracles.

Which of the sentences in an aphorism collection does one write down?

For one thing, the sentences that confirm one: things that one feels are right, that one has often thought, that go against conventional opinion, that justify one. There is much dogmatism in this urge to be confirmed by great or wise men. But it can also be more: a pure joy in meeting a truly congenial mind. For if many sentences by a single man accord with one, then mere dogmatism turns into astonishment: in a totally different time, among totally different people, a man sought to grasp himself in exactly the same way as oneself; the same form, the same definiteness and definition came to him. One would be happy if one's best were equal to his best. Only timidity keeps one from falling into the arms of the older brother: the feeling that many things in one could frighten him.

Then there are two kinds of sentences that do not refer to oneself; one kind is funny, they amuse one with an unexpected turn of phrase or with terseness; as sentences they are new and have the freshness of new words. The others arouse an image that lay ready in one for a long time, in the clarity that permits it to rise.

The strangest effect is perhaps that of the sentences that put one to *shame*. One has many foibles one never worries about. They belong to one, one takes them for granted like eyes or hands. One may even bear a secret tenderness for them; they may have gained one the confidence or admiration of other people. Now, suddenly, one is harshly confronted with them, they are torn from any context of one's own life, as though they could occur anywhere. One doesn't recognize them in-